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of Engineers**
St. Louis District®

News Release

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Fast Action at Lock 24 Saves Boaters

Clarksville, Mo. – A disabled pleasure craft narrowly escaped a potentially serious situation Tuesday, July 13, when quick action and great cooperation by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel and the pilot and deckhand of the helper boat “Polly Jo” rescued them. Four adults and two children, boating in the Mississippi, were drifting helplessly toward the Corps of Engineers Lock & Dam 24 at Clarksville after their engine had apparently failed.

The lock was notified of a possible crisis around 2:50 p.m. when the Motor Vessel Martha Ingram, waiting to lock through, radioed lock personnel to report a pleasure craft with its occupants paddling about one mile north of the lock. Lock operator Buck Hagan received the call and said lock personnel would monitor the situation.

About 30 minutes later the M/V Martha Ingram reported that the boat’s occupants were still paddling and starting to get picked up by the river’s current. Hagan and shift leader Mike Preston decided to radio the helper boat “Polly Jo” for assistance. “Polly Jo” Pilot Bill Wintjen said the water near the craft might be too shallow to permit him to get close enough to help, but he agreed to try. Deckhand Pat White assisted Wintjen.

Meanwhile Hagan hurried down to the upstream end of the lock wall and saw that the occupants had drifted past the last red buoy above the lock and were gaining speed towards the dam.

The moment was very intense, Hagan recalled. “I was involved in a similar rescue last year,” he said. “This time it was even more dangerous though because the dam gates were open higher.”

During last year’s incident the dam’s fifteen, 80-foot wide gates, were open only three feet each, Lockmaster Chris Morgan said. The gates were open nine feet this time. The higher setting results in water being sucked down in front of the dam gates before it exits under them in a fury of whirlpools, eddies and turbulence, Morgan explained.

To everyone’s relief the “Polly Jo” successfully intercepted the craft, locked downstream with the boat and its occupants in tow, and safely took them to a nearby boat dock.

Timely communication between lock personnel and tow operators; alert, quick actions and precision piloting by the “Polly Jo’s” pilot averted a potential tragedy.

If turbulent waters near the dam gates had capsized the pleasure craft it’s unlikely the occupants would have survived. Boaters must exercise extreme caution around dams, either above or below them.

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Note to assignment editors: This is the third such similar successful rescue at a St. Louis District Lock in the past 12 months and raises the timely issue of boating safety in proximity to dams. We would like to offer you opportunities to develop stories that might highlight this danger to recreational boaters on the Mississippi. We can arrange access to our locks and interviews with Corps employees who have participated in past rescues. Please contact us for our assistance or additional information, at 314-331-8002, 8068 or 8095.